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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISTANBUL 000349

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

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TAGS: PHUM PGOV ASEC TU

SUBJECT: CONSUL GENERAL DISCUSSES SECURITY, MINORITIES WITH
ISTANBUL GOVERNOR FOLLOWING MALATYA MURDERS

REF: A. ANKARA 0933

¶B. ANKARA 0144

¶C. 06 ISTANBUL 1691

¶D. ISTANBUL 0212

¶E. 06 ISTANBUL 2156

Classified By: Consul General Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: Consul General met Istanbul Governor Muammer Guler on April 20 to express condolences and address security concerns for American citizens and minority community members in Turkey following the April 18 murders of three Christian bookstore employees in Malatya (ref A). Guler condemned the assassinations and offered assurances the government had taken immediate measures to enhance security in vulnerable areas. CG also used the occasion to address issues affecting the Ecumenical Patriarchate as well as security concerns associated with the Istanbul Consulate General compound earlier raised with the Sariger Mayor. End summary.

THE MALATYA MURDERS

¶12. (C) The brutal April 18 murders of three Christian bookstore employees in Malatya, following the January 19 assassination of human rights advocate Hrant Dink (ref B), has raised security concerns among many foreigners and non-Muslim community members in Turkey. CG, accompanied by RSO and Poloff, called on Istanbul Governor Muammer Guler to express condolences and discuss security measures taken in the aftermath of the murder to protect those who might fall victim to attacks from individuals wishing to exploit the tensions created by the tragic event.

¶13. (C) While expressing his own condolences regarding the April 16 killings of 33 Virginia Tech faculty and students, Governor Guler lamented that the "sick and ill" individuals responsible for the Malatya murders used religion as an excuse. He noted Prime Minister Erdogan, during a conversation the night before, reiterated that such actions "cannot be justified in our own (Muslim) belief system." Guler stressed that while one victim was German, the others, "no matter what religion," were Turkish and that the Constitution doesn't define citizenship by religion. He pointed out that distributing Bibles is permitted and wondered aloud why this act had been carried out now, since for five years this bookstore had distributed Bibles in Malatya without any problems.

¶14. (C) Emphasizing that the Hrant Dink incident shows that "it is possible for anyone to do anything," Guler asked rhetorically, "who benefits from such events?" He then responded that it is Turkey which suffers. He remarked that

it was good the suspects were arrested and that "justice will punish them to the full extent of the law." The Governor added here that, despite press reports to the contrary, all of the perpetrators in the Hrant Dink assassination case have been arrested with sufficient evidence gathered to support their convictions. He recognized that the Malatya incident causes concerns for American citizens and Christians but offered assurances the Istanbul authorities evaluated vulnerabilities in the immediate aftermath of the tragedy and have enhanced security measures in "sensitive" areas. The CG reiterated our willingness to work closely with the Governor's office to identify any vulnerabilities within the community.

CONSULATE GENERAL SECURITY

¶5. (C) CG thanked the Governor for his ongoing assistance in responding to security issues associated with the Consulate General compound and brought to his attention three vulnerabilities that had been discussed with the Sariyer municipality mayor in September (ref C) but which remained issues of concern:

- The illegal construction of "gecekondu" housing overlooking and in some cases nearly overhanging the Consulate General compound and the importance of knowing who is living in those properties;
- Lack of alternative parking options for visa applicants and neighboring residents/small businesses, which results in congestion and blockage on the only road available to employees to access the Consulate General's lower Compound

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Access Control (CAC);

- The possibility of a repeat of the illegal protest which occurred on Consulate General property last August -- or even worse, attacks on employees -- due to lack of clear guidance to Turkish National Police (TNP) regarding the legal status of the property in front of the lower CAC entrance, which belongs to the Consulate but is not fenced off.

¶6. (C) The Governor stated he would discuss all three points with the relevant authorities. He noted that illegal construction was punishable by law and that, while he doubted there was ongoing "gecekondu" construction, he would take steps to stop any and to demolish illegal structures. That said, they would address our concerns regarding building occupants. On the parking situation, the Governor said he would have his staff direct the Sariyer municipality to explore incorporating a paid parking service to avoid choke points in front of the lower CAC. Finally, he suggested the use of barriers or signs to clearly indicate that the property in front of the lower CAC entrance belongs to the USG so that TNP officers would have no doubt regarding the boundaries and how to secure the property. RSO indicated we were already exploring signage.

THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE

¶7. (C) Regarding the Ecumenical Patriarchate, CG thanked the Governor for the opportunity EUR DAS Bryza had March 9 to speak with the Istanbul Deputy Governor responsible for religious minority affairs Fikret Kasapoglu (ref D) and noted the Ambassador had spoken recently to MFA U/S Apakan as well on this subject. Guler listened politely but impassively as CG observed that the Education Minister's support for the possibility of opening Halki Seminary as a vocational school was a hopeful sign, and that it would send a very positive signal if something could be done at a time when the world's

attention was focused on minority issues in Turkey. CG remarked on the positive outcome of last November's Papal visit, noting that the Governor deserved much of the credit for that PR success for Turkey; his office had the difficult task of weighing security concerns against the needs of an open and free society. There had been some bumps -- such as the difficulties experienced by a group of influential American Greek-Orthodox pilgrims in gaining access to the Fener Patriarchate for joint services (ref E) -- but we appreciated the measures taken by the Governor's office to avoid a repeat of those problems.

¶8. (C) Comment: Governor Guler's condemnation of the Malatya murders and affirmation of minority rights and equality of citizenship reflect a wide-spread government strategy to say the "right" things in private despite hesitance to say or do anything in public that might be associated with political risk. We will follow up with the designated individuals in the Governor's office regarding the Consulate General security issues discussed. End comment.

JONES